

Marvelous physician of yore: An introduction to the story of India's unspoken medical genius

-by Sai Sreevatsa Mohan K

Abstract

Medicine in ancient India- Ayurveda is a wonder that is marvelled by the world even today. *Ayurveda* is the most ancient science of Indian medicine and lifestyle that is still in practice till date. Among the Gods worshipped by physicians in India - *Lord Dhanwantari* stands out for His immense contributions to the field of medicine and surgery, so too is the case of the *Ashwini Kumaras* who are considered the physicians of the Gods. They are well known to have performed the most complex surgeries like replacement of the *Daksha's* severed head with a goat head, and also medical wonders like placing an artificial iron leg of *Vishwapala*, curing infertility of *Vardhimati* and many more^[1]. While these Gods are the best physicians we know, there is one God whose achievements in the medical field are unspoken, His history is unclear. Lord *Rudra* - considered as the best among physicians of Vedic age is now known as Lord *Shiva* and His achievements in medicine are unheard by both the medical fraternity as well as people of India.

This article aims at reintroducing Lord *Rudra* or rather listing the medical achievements and invaluable contributions of Lord *Rudra* to the field of medicine, A tribute to the Lord and the application of His contributions which is used even today.

Key words - *Rudra, Sri Rudram, Ayurveda, Mahamrityunjaya mantra*

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Introduction

In 2018, a randomised sample of 30 middle aged women from Thoubal Ningombam in Manipur were selected and their stress levels were assessed pre and post chanting of the **Mahamrityunjaya mantra**.^[2] Cohen's perceived stress test had been used to measure the level of stress. Statistical analysis had been done by using paired t-test. Finding of this study revealed that Mahamrityunjaya mantra significantly **decreased the level of stress** and **normalized the blood pressure** among

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middle-aged women. Surprising is it? A similar study was conducted by PhD scholars from the department of Yoga regarding various styles of mantra chanting and their effect on the **students' cognitive performance**.^[3]

The interesting part is that the same Mahamrityunjaya mantra was used for the study and **significant positive results** were observed for the **silent chanting** method.

The study also gave a detailed analysis using various parameters and also styles of chanting the mantra. Now, we may ask what exactly is this Mahamrityunjaya mantra and what are its medical qualities?

Mahamrityunjaya mantra introduction and relevance

While many researchers are still exploring the various medicinal qualities of this mantra, they have not tried to detail about its origin and usage.

The Mahamrityunjaya mantra appears in the **11th Anuvaka** or subdivision of the **Namakam**. What is this Namakam? Well, to answer this, let us understand where we find the Namakam.

There are 4 vedas which we know - Rigveda, Yajurveda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda . These are the world's oldest written records and they are claimed to have been written around c.**1700-1100 BCE** which is nearly 3700-4000 years ago.^[4] Ok, so why is that introduction needed?

So the second Veda - Yajur Veda is further divided into two -Krishna Yajur Veda and Shukla Yajurveda. In further division called the samhitas, there is a Taitreya samhita which features in the Krishna Yajurveda and here there is a prayer called the **Sri Rudram**.^[5]

The Sri Rudram is one of the important prayers used widely in most of the religious ceremonies like *abhishekam*. It has two parts - **Namakam and Chamakam**

The Mahamrityunjaya mantra features in the Namakam (11th Anuvaka). There is, however , a reference of it in Rigveda 7.59.12 too.^[6] But we may get the question.

The topic of the article is apparently about a medical genius. But, until now, we read about a historical and religious philosophical article here. **What is the relation?**

Mahamrityunjaya mantra and Lord Rudra

Well, the Mahamrityunjaya mantra is a small part of Sri Rudram. The Sri Rudram describes or is a hymn mainly in praise of a God. Sri Rudram describes His different attributes and names. He is credited to have given **62 medicinal formulations**.^[7] His name is supposed to strike terror in the hearts of all fearing Him.

The disease *jwara* is said to have arisen from His anger.^[8] His compassion is said to cure diseases. The graveyard in many regional languages has been named "**Rudrabhoomi**", after Him, suggesting how skilled He was that He with His medical intervention could save lives and thus deciding who goes to the grave. Who is this great physician and what are His contributions?

His name is **LORD RUDRA** and He is called as प्रथम भिषक्- the first physician.^[9] But then we are talking about a God. Is this a philosophical article on God? Well, Lord Rudra is known to today only as a **God**. But we need to understand by the end that He is worshipped as a God today due to His immense contributions to society. What were they and who was Lord Rudra? **Is He the same as Lord Shiva we know today?**

Lord Rudra and Lord Shiva - Same or different ?

People today know Lord Rudra as a synonym or another name for Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva is the most widely worshipped deity in Hinduism, He is one among the trinity- Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. His abode is described as the ice capped Himalayan mountains. His stories resonate in every Indian household. But is He really the same as Lord Rudra?

Well, we can consider that Lord Rudra and Lord Shiva have similar attributes for which they are worshipped today as the same Lord, but they may not have been a single person. From all the historical evidence and literary evidence we have, we can try and distinguish that **Lord Rudra was a different personality** and may not be the same person as Lord Shiva.

Difference between Lord Rudra and Lord Shiva

On the very onset, Lord Rudra is said to be a roaring, wild personality in contrast to the peaceful and auspicious frame of Lord Shiva. Unlike **Lord Shiva** who stands out as one of the **main Gods** today, **Lord Rudra** was another **Demigod** who didn't occupy a very exalted position. The family of Lord Shiva and Lord Rudra are described very differently.

We all know the family of **Lord Shiva** - His consort **Goddess Parvati**, His sons- **Lord Ganesha** and **Lord Karthikeya**. Lord Rudra's family as told in the Vedas is completely different.

Yajurveda 3 Kandikas.57 says- **Goddess Ambika** was the **sister of Lord Rudra**. Today Goddess Ambika is a form of Goddess Parvati -Lord Shiva's consort. The **consort of lord Rudra was Goddess Rodhasi**. Sayana's commentary on Rigveda 1.39.4 , Rigveda 1.114.6 states that **Lord Rudra** was the **father of the Maruts**. The Maruts today are known as Gods of Storm, thunder and wind.^[10]

The **vehicle** of Lord Shiva is the **Nandi** - the bull while **Lord Rudra** was said to ride on a **horse**. These were some significant differences between them. If there was such a clear distinction between both, how did people end up confusing Lord Rudra and Lord Shiva?

The confusion however arises as Lord Rudra was called as Shiva in many contexts. Similarly, the later texts like Mahabharata and the Puranas linked both of them by the virtue of their similarities.^[11] But, then we may get a doubt. What is the relevance of knowing about Lord Rudra and distinguishing Him from Lord Shiva?

Lord Rudra's contribution to Medicine

Well, a man is defined by His achievements and the achievements of Lord Rudra are too vast for us to comprehend. To name a few, He is credited to have given **62 medicinal formulations**. His medical skills are considered excellent. There are more than around **1000 herbs** He is said to have used.^[12] There are many legends that talk of His skill in warfare, hunting and medicine. His **name was used as a title** too.^[13]

For example, in the Rigveda, the Asvini Devatas are called 'Rudras'. Similarly, Mitra-varuna together were called 'Rudra', Agni was called 'Rudra'. (RV.5.70,2; RV.6.26,5).

He was said to keep villages free from diseases. He was conferred the title, "**Vaidyanatha**". The science of *Rasashastra* owes its contributions to Lord Rudra and Lord Shiva. The very origin of '*Parada*' (mercury) is said to be the 'Veerya' of Lord Shiva and Lord Rudra's influence can be seen in the ***Rudra bhaga***.^[14]

In the name of Lord Rudra, the physicians were given a ***bhaga*** or share of **1/11th** of all the medicines value in money for every medicine sold by a medicine seller!

The *Charaka Samhita*, *Sharira sthana* while explaining Loka purusha samya siddhanta, **Lord Rudra in the universe** is said to exist in the human body as ***rosha***(fierceness).^[15] These are just a few instances showing His immense contributions.

Now we may ask, what is the use of studying some historical facts about Lord Rudra and **what do we take away from Him in this era?** Well, it is beautifully described that "The function of the historian is neither to love the past, nor to emancipate himself from the past, but to **understand and master it** as the **key to the understanding of the present**".^[16] The History of Lord Rudra must be understood in this sense to utilise it and apply it in the current day. But are we seriously taking this? Are the contributions of Lord Rudra who lived more than 4000 years ago still applicable to today?

Current day application of Lord Rudra's contributions - coded mantras

Let us understand this with examples. The Sri Rudram which is about the glory of lord Rudra is apparently a powerful hymn that is chanted during worship in all Shiva temples of India. The **Mahamrityunjaya mantra** is currently proven by many researches as seen at the beginning of this article to decrease stress levels, to normalise blood pressure levels, to improve the cognitive performance of students and many more. But that is just like any other Mantra. What is the special contribution of Lord Rudra?

Remedy for 'Kshaya'

Take an example of a verse from the Sri Rudram- ^[17]

“शिवेन वचसा त्वा गिरिशाच्छा बदामसि । यथा नः सर्वमिज्जगद्दयक्ष्म सुमनाऽसत् ॥”

On the onset, the literal meaning is said as: “O' Lord Shiva, as per your words, 'Kshama', who is your charming consort(wife) is the essence of all the worlds. Therefore, as desired by you, , we offer our obeisance to that 'Kshama' which is indeed the essence of the world”. On a closer outlook, one is stunned by the explanation.

Understanding the medical meaning

Let us understand the above mentioned verse, word by word, phrase by phrase -

The phrase- शिवेन वचसा means **As told by Shiva**, त्वा means **your**, गिरिशा meaning from forest, अच्छा means **covered**, बदामसि - this word split into two - बदाम meaning *Badam* Almond, मसि means **ink/oil/milk/juice**. The word सर्वमिज्जगद्दयक्ष्म is finely divided into सर्व meaning **निम्ब (neem)**, मि means measure, जगद् means **consume or eat**, अयक्ष्मगूं refers to क्षय or in **disease** राज्यक्ष्म, सुमना means **the पत्र(leaf) of निम्ब (neem)**, सत् means **juice or oil**.

To sum up, it means: “The Supreme God Shiva says that 'Kshaya ' can be cured, if the mixture of *Badam* (Almond) oil, the milk of the *Khadira* (*Acacia catechu*), the juice of *Nimba* (*Azadirachta indica*) bark and the juice of Neem leaves is consumed for 15 days or till the 'Kshaya' symptoms subsides, whichever is earlier”.

The author KT Shubhakaran mentioned an important note to recite the above Mantra for 108 times daily and the entire Namakam at least once everyday to ensure that the medicines work. If not, they may not work.

'Kshaya' in *Ayurveda* is the equivalent to a number of diseases including **malnutrition syndromes, Tuberculosis, venereal diseases** and many others based on the presentation. The formulation mentioned by the author with the medication can be researched as all the herbs are very potent . Based on the herbs and the useful parts mentioned in the Verse, the author **KT Shubhakaran** gave his formulation-

Formulation:

- 1) **Milk of Khadira** - 300 grams.
- 2) **Oil derived from Badam** (Almond)- 100 ml.
- 3) **Neem bark** : The outer layer of the Neem bark should be removed. Only the red layer covering the wood should be used - 1 kg.
- 4) **Neem leaves**- 21 leaves.
- 5) **Water**- 6 Litres

All the above ingredients are to be boiled till the mixture is reduced to 2 Litres. The mixture is to be filtered using a cotton cloth and consumed in dosage of **6 Table spoonful twice daily to be consumed after food for 21 days.**

(Please note that the formulation and details belong to the author and they are just given as a reference. Any improper use is not the responsibility of the article)^[17]

The remedies for wounds

Let us understand another verse from Sri Rudram.

“या त इषुः शिवतमा शिव-म्बभूव ते धनुः ।
शिवा शरव्या या तव तया नो रुद्र मृडय ।”

A literal meaning of this verse:

“Bless us with happiness our Lord, With that arrow of thine, which is holy, With that bow of thine, which is begetter of good, With that quiver of thine, which is sweet”.
So, what is special? It looks like a normal prayer. But there is a different meaning too.

Understanding the medical meaning

Let us understand it word by word, phrase by phrase -

The word या means **if**, त means **you**, इषु means **arrow**, शिवतमा refers to देवदारु, शिवम् refers to the **healing process**, बभूव refers to **arising**, ते means **your** and धनुः refers to भल्लातक. शिव is the synonym of various herbs like हरितकी, शमी, कन, दर्भ and शरव्या means **wound**, तव means **your**, तया meaning **to protect**, नो means **रुक् or pain**, रुद्र here **indicates fire** and मृडय means **to treat kindly**. To sum it up, we get the meaning as:

“If you are wounded by an arrow or any other weapon the pain arising from the wound can be treated by use of the paste of the following drugs- शिवतमा [देवदारु- Cedrus deodara] ; धनुः(भल्लातक- *Semecarpus anacardium*) and शिव (शमि- *Prosopis spicigera*, हेड- *Terminalia chebula* कन- *Jasminum auriculatum*, हल्दी- *Curcuma longa*, दर्भ-*Desmostachya bipinnata*, पिप्पलीमूल- root of *Piper longum*, गोरेचन- Bile of cattle)”

KT Shubhakaran, in his book, “**Shri Rudram decoded**” goes on to explain how these plants are to be used for the treatment, the mode of administration, the dosage and the details of the medicine mentioned in this verse.

On the outlook, one can find the **wound-healing, stryptic, antiseptic action** of these herbs in the verse. *Devadaru* is a good antibacterial,^[18] *Bhallataka* is an excellent analgesic and antibacterial and anti-inflammatory,^[19] *Pippali* is an excellent bioavailability enhancer as well as antimicrobial.^[20] *Haridra* has all the properties - immunostimulant, antimicrobial and antioxidant.^[21] *Darbha* is an excellent coolant by nature and thus attributes to its haemostatic action.^[22] *Haritaki* too has antibacterial, antimicrobial, antifungal, anti-helminthic and cytoprotective properties.^[23]

Other remedies from Sri Rudram

We may argue as to what is the use of this remedy in the current day as arrow wounds are very rare. However, the current application can stretch beyond just arrow wounds and can even be applied after proper research to projectile weapon wounds like **bullet wounds**.

This is not all. The next few verses which follow explain the herbs and treatment for अर्शसु, (anal fissure/ fistula and related diseases) हृद्रोग (heart diseases), नेत्ररोग (eye disorders), उदर

रोग, कास-श्वास(upper respiratory tract infections) and many diseases like **infertility, joint pain, snakebite, treatment for pregnant women, treatment of unborn child, increasing sexual vigour** and the list is vast. ^[24]

Rules for use in today's medicine

Sri Rudram, the prayer on Lord Rudra is said to be a dual purpose medicine. It is to be recited 11 times, twice a day for 43 days along with administration of the herbs and treatment in the verses . The verses are to be chanted praying to Lord Rudra and if the patient is unable to recite, a person well versed can recite praying to Lord Rudra and touching the affected part with his hand. ^[25]

The authenticity of the herbs, the treatments mentioned are the work under research. However, it must be noted that anything documented in the medical field is done either after proper clinical findings or keeping in mind the perfectness of the mode of action in theory. Whatever is the case, it is an absolute marvel that a text of Lord Rudra that is as old as nearly **3500- 4000 years ago** is still applicable to date and this indeed proves the genius that Lord Rudra is as a physician.

Questions at the end

Unfortunately, due to historical ambiguities, the society has not spoken of Lord Rudra as the medical genius. Rather, we today know Lord Rudra as another name of Lord Shiva, we know Him just as another Hindu God who is worshipped in temples.

Looking beyond this aspect, we must respect the contributions of Lord Rudra to the field of medicine. But let us ask ourselves - Who exactly was Lord Rudra? What was His time period? What exactly are those **62 formulations** attributed to Him? Are they still useful today? Where did He live? How did He attain medical excellence and how relevant is He today in the current medical scenario.

Lord Rudra's formulations and conclusion

A great man said, " **Men may come and men may go, but I go on forever**".^[26] Slightly modified interpretation, we can understand that Men may come and go in the centuries but the achievements, service, wisdom passed on by Great Gods like Lord Rudra lives on forever.

The ***Chandraprabha Vati, Curnaraja/Sankara Lauha, Vijaya Gutika, Sitabhanji rasa, Putra Prada rasa, Sarvavyadhihara*** are just few formulations given by Lord Rudra.^[27] The *Chandraprabha Vati* continues to be used to date in many Ayurvedic hospitals for kidney disorders like urinary tract infections, renal calculi etc, gastrointestinal diseases like constipation, bloating of abdomen, colic pain etc. It is also used in allergic skin conditions and reproductive problems like semen defects and others.^[28]

While this is just an introduction to Lord Rudra's greatness, by His grace, let us explore in further articles about the life and medical knowledge of Lord Rudra. Gods are not born, they are made through their immense wisdom and contribution to society. The medical fraternity of today has two valuable lessons from Lord Rudra -

Selfless service to society can elevate the doctor to the level of God and the use of currently described medicines in Shri Rudram is the need of the hour.

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